

Nixon's Active Role on Plumbers: His Talks With Leaders Recalled

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WASHINGTON, Dec. 9 — President Nixon played a far more active role in the secret operations of the White House plumbers than either he or witnesses before the Senate Watergate committee have reported.

The President has publicly stated that he approved the bypassing of the Federal Bureau of Investigation to establish in 1971 the clandestine White House group designed to plug leaks of secret information. But he also insisted that he "did not authorize and had no knowledge of any illegal means" used by the plumbers.

Interviews in the last few weeks with Federal investigators and with dozens of present and former Government officials disclosed that the President developed a close working relationship with the leaders of the plumbers through a series of meetings in the White House Oval Office in the summer of 1971.

In July, 1971, authoritative sources said, when Mr. Nixon gave John D. Ehrlichman, his principal domestic adviser, over-all responsibility for the activities of the plumbers, he told him to urge the special investigators to read a chapter in his autobiography, "Six Crises," dealing with Alger Hiss.

In the chapter, Mr. Nixon noted that as a Congressman investigating Mr. Hiss in 1950 he and committee aides "did not trust the Justice Department to prosecute the case with the vigor we thought it deserved."

Former White House officials said the President kept in personal touch with the plumbers' operations in August and early September, 1971, through a series of personal meetings with David R. Young Jr., a former National Security Council aide who was a co-director of the group.

At his one meeting with the other co-director, Egil Krogh Jr., these sources said, Mr.

Nixon angrily declared that national security was more important than the "civil rights of some bureaucrats" and personally ordered Mr. Krogh to begin an extensive series of lie-detector tests of Federal officials to determine the sources of some leaks. The tests began immediately.

The interviews by The Times produced no information conflicting with the President's statement that he had not known of plans for the plumbers to break into the Los Angeles offices of the former psychiatrist of Daniel Ellsberg, the onetime Pentagon official who was accused in the Pentagon papers case. The papers, which were obtained by the press, were a secret Defense Department study of United States involvement in the war in Vietnam.

Details of the national security rationale invoked by the President for setting up the plumbers and for demanding a

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limit on the Watergate investigation were reported by The New York Times today.

According to former White House officials, the President and his national security adviser, Henry A. Kissinger, now the Secretary of State, feared that a full inquiry into the Ellsberg case would eventually result in disclosure of United States nuclear secrets and compromise a Soviet K.G.B. (intelligence) official operating as an American counterspy.

The validity of these concerns has been a subject of sharp dispute among officials and investigators informed of the facts. The Times sources said that no specific evidence supporting the White House fears about Dr. Ellsberg had been obtained by the plumbers. And intelligence officials have noted that the value and loyalty of the Soviet counterspy has been a subject of dispute in the Central Intelligence Agency and in some offices of the F.B.I.

As reconstructed by the sources for The Times, there

was no White House move immediately after publication by The Times on June 13, 1971, of the first article of the Pentagon papers series to set up a special investigations unit. The first concern of the President, according to these sources, who to gather as much information as possible about Dr. Ellsberg.

Ehrlichman Picked

To direct this work, the President chose Mr. Ehrlichman, who had concerned himself mainly with domestic affairs. "The only reason he [Ehrlichman] ever got into this was because Henry [Kissinger] had all of those balls in the air and the President was looking for somebody to turn to," one former official said.

After Dr. Ellsberg was publicly named as the source of the Pentagon papers, Mr. Kissinger, and Attorney General John N. Mitchell speculated in meetings with the President that Dr. Ellsberg could have been either a Soviet informer or part of a domestic Communist conspiracy, according to the former official.

After some internal debate, it was decided to set up the plumbers operation. As initially en-

visioned, official sources said, there would have been no police or undercover work by the group; instead its functions were limited to coordinating the investigation into Dr. Ellsberg as well as the various mechanisms, against leaks in existence inside the Federal bureaucracy.

In addition to being upset by the publication of the Pentagon papers, the White House had been stung by a Times dispatch of June 21 by Tad Szulc reporting that United States military supplies were being shipped to Pakistan in apparent violation of an Administration ban. The article, printed while The Times was enjoined from publishing more documents from the Pentagon papers, was repeatedly cited by former senior White House officials in recent interviews as stimulating the plumbers operation.

Krogh Given Job

In early July, 1971, Mr. Ehrlichman and others were said to believe that the investigation into Dr. Ellsberg's background would take six months or longer. So at mid-month the task was handed to Mr. Krogh,

then a 32-year-old aide to Mr. Ehrlichman who had previously been involved in such disparate areas as narcotics control and District of Columbia affairs.

Earlier in July Mr. Krogh had traveled to Southeast Asia in connection with an Administration drug-control project. On his return to San Clemente on July 16—where Mr. Nixon had announced the successful completion of Mr. Kissinger's secret China trip—Mr. Krogh was told of his new assignment by Mr. Ehrlichman. It was on this occasion that the domestic adviser relayed a suggestion from the President to read the first chapter of "Six Crises."

In the book, published in 1962, Mr. Nixon described the Hiss case as one that "involved the security of the whole nation and the cause of free men everywhere." The first chapter described Mr. Hiss as one who had leaked highly classified Government documents and said that "the Hiss case aroused the nation for the first time to the existence and character of the Communist conspiracy within the United States."

White House officials said

that both Mr. Ehrlichman and Mr. Krogh had no doubt that Mr. Nixon was equating Dr. Ellsberg with Mr. Hiss, a comparison that heightened their sense of urgency.

While on that same trip to California, one well-informed source, said, President Nixon went to a private dinner at Perino's, an exclusive restaurant in Los Angeles, with his key aides—Mr. Kissinger, H. R. Haldeman, then his chief of staff, and Mr. Ehrlichman. The source said the four men had discussed the plumbers operation on a helicopter returning them to San Clemente after dinner and it was agreed to reassign Mr. Young from his role as the National Security Council's administrative assistant to aid Mr. Krogh. Mr. Kissinger had initially resisted the new assignment for Mr. Young because he

wished to keep him on his staff.

One former high-level White House aide recalled that Mr. Young, whom he scathingly described as "Henry's Lord Chamberlain," demanded and received assurances that he would be equal to Mr. Krogh on the project. But, in fact, Mr. Krogh was always considered to be the nominal head of the operation.

Returning to Washington in Air Force One after the San Clemente visit, Mr. Nixon decided that "since Bud (Krogh) was going to be the lead horse on this, he'd better see him," one former White House official recalled. The meeting was set for Saturday morning, July 24, in the Oval Office in the White House.

In a May 22 statement this year, Mr. Nixon described his meeting with Mr. Krogh—Mr. Ehrlichman was also there—this way:

"I told Mr. Krogh that as a matter of first priority, the unit should find out all it could about Mr. Ellsberg's associates and his motives. Because of the extreme gravity of the situation, and not then knowing what additional national secrets Mr. Ellsberg might disclose, I did impress upon Mr. Krogh the vital importance to the national security of his assignment. I did not authorize and had no knowledge of any illegal means to be used to achieve this goal."

Highly reliable sources described the meeting as tense. At the time, late July, 1971, Mr. Kissinger was in the midst of secret negotiations with Anatoly F. Dobrynin, the Soviet Ambassador to the United States, on limiting strategic arms.

The day before the Nixon-Krogh meeting The Times published a dispatch by William



Associated Press and The New York Times
Beginning in 1948, Alger Hiss, left, was the subject of an investigation on charges that he had leaked Government secrets to a Communist agent. One of the investigators was Representative Richard M. Nixon, shown here examining microfilm entered as evidence. When the Pentagon papers were published in 1971, President Nixon is reported to have equated Mr. Hiss with Dr. Daniel Ellsberg.

Beecher, now a Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, outlining the United States fallback position in strategic arms limitation talks with the Soviet Union. This fallback position was not known to the American delegation conducting the formal talks with the Russians.

Nixon Reported Upset

"The President was really hyped up on the SALT leak," one source said, in recalling the Nixon-Krogh meeting. "He was slamming the desk with his palms."

However, the Russians, through Mr. Kissinger's private negotiations with Mr. Dobrynin, knew of the American fallback position. Therefore Mr. Nixon's reaction has been attributed by some to his embarrassment over Mr. Kissinger's bypassing his regular negotiating team to hold secret "background" talks with the Russian Ambassador.

Mr. Nixon began the session by "elaborating on the problems created by leaks—in terms of his foreign policy," one source said. "He didn't name Ellsberg as the one who did it [the SALT leak], but it was the

straw that broke the camel's back."

The plumbers were given a new assignment by the President, the source said: instead of merely coordinating the campaigns against leaks throughout the Government and looking into Dr. Ellsberg's background, they were now directed to begin a White House police operation to discover who was responsible for leaks.

As one source recalls the conversation, "The President said, 'I want every son of a bitch in the State Department polygraphed until you find the guy.'" But Mr. Krogh, a lawyer who had worked in Mr. Ehrlichman's law firm in Seattle before joining the White House, indicated that he "didn't know if legally he could compel anyone to take the tests."

At that point Mr. Nixon exploded, the source remembers, telling Mr. Krogh that "I don't give a good Goddamn about that; it's more important to find the source of these leaks rather than worry about the civil rights of some bureaucrats." The source recalled that Mr.

Nixon had "indicated that he didn't want to wait; he wanted Krogh to get the facts as soon as possible."

Another source with firsthand knowledge of the meeting recalled that "Nixon wanted to polygraph everybody; he wanted more polygraphing than there were machines available. So Bud had to tell him that there weren't enough machines."

Lie-Detection Tests

The plumbers immediately began coordinating a series of lie detector tests that were administered by security officials in the State Department, the Pentagon and the Central Intelligence Agency. The operation was considered a success, one former White House aide said. "We thought we narrowed down some of Beecher's contacts and they were fired or driven out of the 'Government.'"

The names of those who were ousted have not been disclosed.

Recalling the Nixon-Krogh meeting recently, one former White House official noted that the President "gave Bud a very broad charter."

By that time, the end of July, as testimony before the Senate Watergate committee has established, the White House had, in effect, written off the F.B.I. as a tool in its inquiry into the Ellsberg case, believing that J. Edgar Hoover, the F.B.I. director, was personally too close to Louis Marx, Dr. Ellsberg's father-in-law.

"Bud was tough and depend-

able," a former White House Aide noted. "He required very little attention and checking back on:

"And," the source added, "he had a 'Little Abner' attitude toward the President—whatever Nixon told him to do, he did."

'Came From Oval Office'

One former White House aide recalled a meeting with Mr. Krogh shortly after he returned from his visit to the Oval Office. "The kid was shaking with the sobriety of the assignment—at the enormity of the task and the importance of it," the former aide said. Later, John W. Dean 3d, the former White House counsel, testified at the Watergate hearing that Mr. Krogh had told him that the order for the burglary of the offices of Dr. Ellsberg's psychiatrist in Los Angeles, "came from the Oval Office."

Mr. Krogh has since said, through his attorney, that he was not "associating" himself with Mr. Dean's comment in any way. Other sources close to Mr. Krogh told The Times that Mr. Nixon did not author-

ize the Ellsberg burglary at the July 24 meeting.

Similarly, none of the officials and investigators interviewed by The Times had knowledge of any specific Presidential authorization for the burglary given during the meeting.

Despite the apparent lack of specific authorization, Mr. Krogh's attorney, Stephen N. Shulman, unsuccessfully sought permission last month to subpoena a tape of that meeting in an effort to show that "instructions were given" to his client by the President. After a Federal court ruled against him, Mr. Krogh agreed to plead guilty to criminal charges stemming from his role in the Ellsberg burglary, declaring that in "good conscience" he could no longer assert national security as a defense.

From the day of the publication of the Pentagon papers, one key official said, there was a "crosscurrent" of purposes, with national security considerations mingling with what some White House aides believed was a significant opportunity to discredit Dr. Ellsberg and left-wing elements.

Mr. Nixon took an active part in drafting Administration strategy.

One former high-level White House aide recalled being summoned into Mr. Nixon's office shortly before oral arguments on the Pentagon papers were to be held before Judge Murray I. Gurfein of the United States District Court in New York on June 17, 1971. Judge Gurfein had issued a temporary restraining order on June 15 prohibiting publication of any more of the documents.

Nixon's Concern Recalled

The former aide recalled that Mr. Nixon was "concerned" because Whitney North Seymour, the United States Attorney arguing for the Government, had complained that he did not have enough information to justify a court order restraining publication of the material on national security grounds.

Within a day, Adm. Noel Gayler, then director of the National Security Agency, provided an affidavit to Mr. Ehrlichman, listing a number of electronic and communications intelligence operations that the agency believed were compromised by publication of the papers.

Judge Gurfein subsequently lifted the restraining order, and, after rulings by appellate courts in New York and Washington, the case was taken to the Supreme Court.

On June 26, the historic case

was argued before the Supreme Court in an unusual Saturday morning session. Then the Justices retired to consider their decision.

While they were weighing the case, two events occurred that have raised suspicion on the part of Federal investigators that the White House attempted to influence the Court's decision.

The first was the indictment in Los Angeles on June 28 of Dr. Ellsberg on charges of theft and unlawful possession of the

Pentagon papers. The indictment was reportedly issued over the protests of Justice Department officials in Los Angeles who did not think the Government's case was ready.

The next day Victor Lasky, a conservative columnist with close ties to the White House, published the first article reporting that a set of the Pentagon papers had been provided to the Soviet Embassy in Washington. "It was definitely a White House leak," one Government investigator said.

If the Administration hoped the two events would help influence the Supreme Court, it hoped in vain, because on June 30 the Justices decided, 6 to 3, to invalidate the injunction against publication of the papers.

One senior investigator speculated that the Supreme Court's adverse ruling was seen as a serious political rebuff by White House advisers; and the ruling itself became a key factor in the subsequent decision by the Nixon Administration to move politically against Dr. Ellsberg.

"After losing the case," he said, "they had to recoup against Ellsberg. They had to counteract the possibility that Ellsberg would use his trial for political purposes later in the year or early in 1972—election year.

Political Tinge Discerned

Government investigators now believe that by the time the plumbers began their operation — after the July 24 meeting with the President — part of their operation was awfully political, to discredit Dr. Ellsberg and the antiwar movement.

One key former White House aide noted that E. Howard Hunt Jr., the former Central Intelligence Agency official who was assigned to the plumbers a few days after the leak on strategic arms limitation talks, had initially been recruited for the White House by Charles W. Colson, the Presidential counsel who was in charge of political

operations.

"I always contemplated from the first day Colson brought Hunt around [to the plumbers] that Colson was going to use Hunt for his political operations," the former official added.

Mr. Hunt testified during grand jury proceedings in Los Angeles last June that he was reassigned to Mr. Krogh's unit in late July, 1971, and told "that I was to cooperate fully" with him. G. Gordon Liddy, a former F.B.I. agent, was similarly reassigned from tasks on the White House Domestic Council staff to the plumbers, at the request of Mr. Krogh.

Operation Set Up

The four plumbers set up operation in Room 16 in the basement of the Executive Office Building across the street from the White House. The room was considered to be the highest security area inside the executive complex—with the exception of Mr. Nixon's office. As Mr. Hunt testified in Los Angeles:

"There was a special alarm system, three-way combination safes. And there was also a type of war room. It was an office in which there was a cork bulletin board. It indicated a large number of ongoing projects, their status, and the names of the individuals responsible for their completion."

The four plumbers agreed to try to meet every afternoon at 4 o'clock, Mr. Hunt told the grand jury, to coordinate their operations. At first, Mr. Hunt was disappointed with the group; he had apparently expected more immediate action.

He repeatedly told Mr. Colson in late July and early August "of his concerns that the Room 16 unit was bogged down; that it was a paper mill." By Aug. 13, Mr. Colson told the California grand jury, Mr. Hunt was more sanguine and said "in passing" that the operation was "functioning and working well."

By then, the plumbers had made arrangements with the C.I.A. for physical disguises, phony documents and safe houses to help plan and execute the Ellsberg burglary. By then, too, Mr. Young—citing

Mr. Kissinger's name—had requested and received a C.I.A. psychological assessment of Dr. Ellsberg. The studies were well-known to the former national security aide. The C.I.A. prepares detailed psychological analyses of major world leaders on a continuing basis as well as compiling a psychiatric profile of every foreign negotiator before major international meetings.

Krogh-Young Rift Discerned

Complicating the day-to-day routine of the plumbers, one former high-level White House aide recalled, was a growing rivalry between Mr. Young and Mr. Krogh. Mr. Young was a few years older than Mr. Krogh and extremely sensitive about appearing to be Mr. Krogh's subordinate on the plumbers; hence their title as co-directors.

In addition, the former aide said: "Young had a tremendous advantage over Krogh—he knew most of the important people at the Pentagon and State."

Mr. Young had also had a close association with Mr. Kissinger, who had relied heavily on his former administrative assistant, sources recalled, not necessarily for National Security Council matters but for some mundane affairs—such as handling his social schedule and personal business.

"Dave's wife even did Henry's laundry," one former official said.

In any event, sources recalled, Mr. Young—who had no other assignment that summer while Mr. Krogh continued to handle his other White House duties—was soon writing most of the group's memos—only a few of which, sources said, have been made available thus far to the Senate Watergate committee and publicly released.

High-Level Meetings

More significantly, in Mr. Krogh's eyes, Mr. Young began to meet regularly—and alone—with Mr. Ehrlichman and President Nixon. "Krogh never understood Young's operation," one source said, in reference to Mr. Young's high-level meetings. "He always thought Young was end-running him."

While Mr. Krogh was never able to discuss plumbers business personally with the President after the July 24 meeting, Mr. Nixon reportedly grew fond of Mr. Young and, as one former high-level aide said, "began calling for him."

"There was an occasion when I took David in to talk to the President and he made an extremely favorable impression," the former Nixon aide said. The

President met with Mr. Young at least five times in late summer of 1971.

Asked about the Nixon-Young relationship, the ex-White House aide hesitated a moment and then responded:

"This is almost psychic. The President didn't have a lot of contact with young guys on the staff. So when he found one he could relate to, he liked to get him in. David came from a big New York law firm, had contact with the Rockefeller family, wasn't too intense—he didn't shuffle in fear in the Oval Office—and he was very discreet." All of these factors, the source suggested, set Mr. Young apart from Mr. Krogh and other young members on the immediate White House staff—at least during the summer of 1971.

Fears About Ellsberg

Some officials close to the plumbers investigation believe that Mr. Young played a pivotal role in relaying President Nixon's continuous fears about Dr. Ellsberg to the plumbers.

White House defenders of the plumbers argue even now that the operation was conducted not for political reasons, but in an attempt to determine whether Dr. Ellsberg may have been a Soviet agent and to find out what other national security information he possessed.

Other officials note that the plumbers wanted to buttress a C.I.A. psychological study of Dr. Ellsberg, to determine whether he was a psychotic. If so, one former White House insider suggested in a recent interview, the

evidence could be discreetly used to counter any of his future revelations.

Government investigators hold a different view. "My feelings is that from the beginning these guys [the plumbers] were out to get Ellsberg," one senior investigator said in a recent interview. He noted that both Mr. Young and Mr. Hunt had justified the burglary of the psychiatrist's office on the ground that the doctor's notes might have contained the names of Dr. Ellsberg's conspirators and any Soviet contacts.

But at the time of the break-in, the investigator added, the psychiatrist, Dr. Lewis J. Fielding, had already informed F.B.I. agents that he had not treated Dr. Ellsberg in a year. Other investigators believe that while the national security aspects of the case had been dramatized by the White House, some concern was justified. "The answers aren't as clear as everybody would like to have them," one source said.

The investigators said, nonetheless, they were confident

that they could prove that the plumbers planned to obtain Dr. Ellsberg's psychiatric records almost from the day President Nixon gave the operation his urgent go-ahead.

Memo on Getting Files

On July 28, according to a plumber document made public during the Senate Watergate committee hearings, Mr. Hunt wrote Mr. Colson a memorandum in which he proposed that his unit "obtain Ellsberg's files from his psychiatric analyst." By that date, however, Dr. Fielding had twice told F.B.I. agents that he would not respond to their inquiries, on the ground that communications between a doctor and his patient were privileged.

On Aug. 11, according to another memo, Mr. Ehrlichman approved a recommendation from Mr. Krogh and Mr. Young calling for "a covert operation [to] be undertaken to examine all the medical files still held by Ellsberg's psychoanalyst."

Mr. Ehrlichman initialed his approval on the document and added the following words: "If done under your assurance that it is not traceable." Mr. Ehrlichman told the Senate Watergate committee last summer that he assumed the operation would involve the compromising of an office nurse or someone similar. He said he had not expected a break-in.

Last September Mr. Ehrlichman was charged with three state counts of burglary, conspiracy and perjury in Los Angeles in connection with his role in the Ellsberg break-in. He pleaded not guilty and will face trial on Dec. 19, along with Mr. Young and Mr. Liddy, who have also pleaded not guilty to charges of burglary and conspiracy. All three may face Federal charges in connection with the still-pending Watergate investigation here.

Use of Materials

Investigators have cited the Aug. 26 "status" memorandum from Mr. Young to Mr. Ehrlichman, which noted that in case "the present Hunt/Liddy Project No. 1 [the Ellsberg burglary] is successful, it will be absolutely essential to have an over-all game plan developed for its use." The next day, Mr. Ehrlichman made the same point in a similar memorandum to Mr. Colson, asking him to report as "to how and when you believe the materials should be used."

Those memos, it was learned, have taken on added significance to Government investigators because of the as yet undisclosed testimony of Mr. Young, who began cooperating with Federal authorities in the United States Attorney's office

here shortly after the break-in at the Ellsberg psychiatrist's office became known last spring.

Mr. Young is expected to be a key witness against Mr. Ehrlichman in any court case brought by the special Watergate prosecutors office headed by Leon Jaworski, sources said. Mr. Jaworski has indicated that some indictments would be handed up early next year.

The sources said Mr. Young had provided a detailed description of conversations with Mr. Ehrlichman beginning on Aug. 27 in which he says he specifically discussed details of the then-planned Ellsberg break-in.

Entry Gained to Office

On Aug. 25, Mr. Hunt and Mr. Liddy managed to gain brief entrance to Dr. Fielding's office in Los Angeles under false pretenses. They took dozens of photographs of the office and surrounding area without being detected. After the successful reconnaissance, they began planning for the break-in itself, which was scheduled to take place over the Labor Day holiday, in early September.

Reliable sources say Mr. Young has testified that he told Mr. Ehrlichman of the successful entry into Dr. Fielding's office on Aug. 27, two days after

it took place. A few days later, the sources said, according to Mr. Young's testimony, he and Mr. Krogh discussed the break-in operation once again with Mr. Ehrlichman by telephone.

In addition, the sources said, Mr. Young will testify that he specifically discussed the failure of the burglary—which produced no psychiatric or other material—with Mr. Ehrlichman in a telephone call placed after Labor Day to Cape Cod, where Mr. Ehrlichman was vacationing with his family.

Testimony before the Los Angeles grand jury showed that the break-in itself—committed the night of Sept. 3 by a three-man Cuban-American team, headed by Bernard L. Barker, two of whose members participated in the Watergate break-in nearly a year later—was inept.

Mr. Barker had entered Dr. Fielding's office on a pretext a few hours before the break-in itself to leave a bag with C.I.A. burglary equipment in it and also to make sure that he taped the office door open.

Tells of Forcing Lock

But Eugenio R. Martinez, another team member, testified that he and Felipe de Diego had to force the lock a few hours later to get into the office. "It

looks like the maid, after she cleaned, she lock it again," Mr. Martinez said. A somewhat similar failure on taping doors open led to the arrests inside the Watergate apartment complex in June of the following year.

Mr. Hunt and Mr. Liddy served as lookouts during the operation, the grand jury was told, and did not enter Dr. Fielding's office during the burglary in which no material on Dr. Ellsberg was found.

At his request, Mr. Krogh will not begin his discussions with Federal officials until his sentencing — expected early next year — on the technical charge of criminal conspiracy to deny Dr. Ellsberg's civil rights, to which he has confessed. But one source said that he would testify that he "feels that everything was authorized," before the Ellsberg burglary took place.

Mr. Krogh was reliably reported to be far less clear than Mr. Young about specific conversations involving the break-in. "He's just not as clear on just what was passed up the line," said one source familiar with both men's testimony.

Difference on Details

For example, a reliable source said, Mr. Krogh recalled Mr. Young's telephone call to Mr. Ehrlichman from Mr. Krogh's office a few days before the break-in, but he is unable to substantiate Mr. Young's recollection that specific details about the break-in were discussed.

"I think what happened," the source said, "is that Young passed on his precise understanding of what was going to happen and Krogh passed on his imprecise understanding. But they both feel what they passed on was authorized."

Government investigators now believe that Mr. Ehrlichman has been placed in an untenable position as a result of Mr. Young's and Mr. Krogh's testimony and hope to question him more completely about any Nixon role in the break-in. The President has said he first learned of the break-in early this spring.

At one point during a grand jury appearance in Los Angeles last June, however, Mr. Ehrlichman testified that the Hunt-Liddy project had been discussed with President Nixon before it was approved. But Mr. Ehrlichman indicated that at no time was the discussion put in the context of a burglary.

During the California grand jury proceedings, the following colloquy between Joseph B. Busch Jr., the Los Angeles County District Attorney, and Mr. Ehrlichman took place:

Mr. Busch: "Did you approve that recommendation [from Mr. Krogh regarding the California operation]?"

Mr. Ehrlichman: "I believe the recommendation was discussed specifically with the President before it was approved."

Mr. Busch: "By you?"

Mr. Ehrlichman: "No. I—as I say, I believe he—he specifically approved it. And it's my recollection that he either discussed with—well, I know he discussed it with Mr. Hoover [the former F.B.I. director, who died in may 1972]."

The questions about Presidential involvement ended there, according to a transcript of the grand jury proceedings.

Federal investigators make no secret of their hope that Mr. Ehrlichman, who is now practicing law in Seattle, may decide to cooperate to avoid a long jail term.

He is known to feel isolated and cut off from the White House and one of his close associates recently complained to a newsman about the "Berlin wall" of two Nixon assistants—Ronald L. Ziegler and Gen. Alexander H. Haig Jr., a sardonic reference to the commonly held belief that Mr. Ehrlichman and Mr. Haldeman, the former White House chief of staff, who are of German ancestry, blocked staff access to the President during the first Nixon term.